

Woodchips

It started out as only wonder and amazement, and turned Rich Russell, a Water Resource Specialist with DNRC’s Kalispell Regional Water Office, into an artist. “I saw a carving back in 1982 and wondered to myself, ‘How could someone do this with wood?’ and I just took it from there.” Rich ended up buying the carving and began a journey that has yet to end, one in which he makes spectacular carvings (see photos) that most consider art.

“I tried to copy that first piece I bought,” Rich explained. “It’s fair to say that over the last twenty-plus years I’ve completed over 400 pieces since that first one.” He works exclusively in cottonwood bark, using the natural folds in the bark as his canvas. “I use the bark of cottonwood trees that comes primarily from the Flathead and Kootenai river drainages. The trees that the bark comes from are big enough for a person to stand in the middle, they’re that big,” Rich exclaimed. According to Russell the bark is easy to carve, “It’s a lot like pine for carving purposes. It’s considered soft, but it does take a little effort to work the bark.”



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“This was, and is, mainly just a hobby for me, a way to spend my spare time,” he expounded. Using an Exacto knife, a linoleum knife, and occasionally a Dremel tool, for all his carvings, from start to finish, it takes about two to three weeks from start to finished product. When asked about carving in different mediums or doing life sized statues, Russell commented, “I’ve tried hardwoods and some other types of mediums, but I don’t like it quite as much. This cottonwood bark has such pretty wood grain in it. And as a far as size, I do primarily the standard sized stuff (as indicated in the photos).”

The question could be asked, “What happens when you make a mistake?” According to Russell, it’s relatively easy, if you take out too much in one area, you just have to make sure you take out the same amount on the other side to make it balanced. “But, if you’re making a face and you cut off the nose, well, you’ve ruined the carving. It’s just that simple,” he laughed.

Currently, Russell is working on a “Skin Walker” which is a representation of a Native American with a coyote skin draped over his head for hunting purposes. “It should be completed in the next couple of weeks,” he said. When asked where he gets his inspiration, “I can just look at a piece of bark and see that there is a figure or person inside that I need to get to. I can just see the object in the wood,” he said. Upon completion of each project, Russell sprays a clear protective coat over the piece to preserve and protect the piece.

Over the years, Rich has perfected his craft, reading books, studying other wood crafters techniques and carvings. Some would say that it’s more than just a hobby, but rather an obsession. However, Russell has chosen to pass down his knowledge and skill to his son, who is now an accomplished carver in his own right and is selling his carvings.

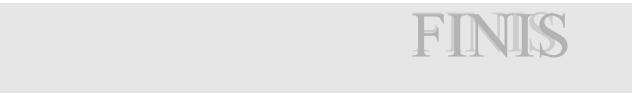
When he started, Russell was taking his carvings to art expositions and trade shows to sell but found sales to be less than brisk. Now, he mainly just utilizes word of mouth as his most effective means of selling his carving.



PHOTOS By Rich Russell

Rich works at his hobby a couple of nights a week, depending on his schedule and mood. “It depends on my mood because my mood shows up in my work. So, if I’m not in the mood for it, I’ve learned, I just don’t do it.”

How much Bark could a Craftsman Hustle, if He’s Certain - n - Subtle, and a Carver Named Russell ?



NEWSLETTER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION • DIRECTOR MARY SEXTON

MONTANA

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Conversation

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“they were far too valuable to simply discard”

fixes and mitigations

“Goodness sakes, it opens up a tremendous area”



Easements
Improve
Recreational
Opportunities . . .



“I had to question myself and what I was doing there”

You’ve taken up running, lifting weights, keeping yourself in better shape. But, are you in good enough shape to handle climbing Mount McKinley? Fred Robinson can say yes to that question, as he is one DNRC employee that’s climbed the lofty peak, one of the premier climbs in the world.

Please see COVER STORY next page

“To help ensure Montana’s land and water resources provide benefits for present and future generations”

DNRC in the Future

Greetings! It is a pleasure to be addressing you today as a part of the DNRC team. It has been an interesting and tiring 3 months as I learn more about this agency and the work that is being done. Before I delve into where I see the future of this department, I want to take just a moment to introduce myself and give you a bit of my background.

I am originally from Great Falls, graduating from CMR High School. I attended Stanford University and the University of Montana. I taught in Hamilton for several years. In addition to teaching, I was also involved with both agriculture and tourism businesses. I served on boards including the Public Wildlife/Private Lands Council, BLM Resource Advisory Council, and the Teton County Commission from 1999-2004. I also served as the administrator of The Nature Conservancy’s Pine Butte Swamp Preserve, west of Choteau. I am married and have one daughter.

My approach to administering DNRC, with its diverse functions and skilled staff, will be to bring balance and open communication to the task of managing our resources. I will strive to meet and listen to all interest groups and individuals while addressing their concerns directly and honestly. I will promote open discussion about issues of importance to regions of Montana. I will seek balance in the approach the Department pursues, keeping in mind the need to sustain and enhance the natural resource treasures of Montana so that future generations will continue to benefit from their use.



Director Mary Sexton

In summary, I look at my job as director of DNRC as working with Montanans to keep what is best in Montana while paying attention to the needs of our State now and in the future. It is, indeed, a balancing act!

With that said, I know that I cannot and should not do that alone. Rather, I have and will continue to rely on you, each and everyone, to continue doing what you do best as trained and dedicated professionals. I feel truly honored to be a part of this team that I’ve admired for many years as just a citizen. I hope to work side by side with all of you as we meet the future challenges head-on and address them one at a time, giving each their due time.

And, I look forward to meeting each of you as I begin traveling to each of the Regional Water Offices, Area Office and Unit offices, to get your ideas and inputs on how best to manage our resources and our agency.

I have an open door policy, if you should need to discuss something with me or are just in town, stop and say “HELLO!”

Mary

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After Rainier in 2003, their goal became North America’s highest peak

Robinson, an attorney in DNRC’s Water Resource Division, began his climbing career at the age of six as he scampered around the Rimrocks north of Billings. As he got older, his family and friends took many backpacking trips into the nearby Beartooth Wilderness, both day and weeklong adventures.

Cover Story

“As I got into high school, we were taking longer trips into the Beartooth’s. We would establish base camps and then take smaller day trips here and there ‘scrambling’ around the mountains,” Robinson explained. These types of trips were common for Robinson as he moved through college and into the next several years of his life.

Another passion that Robinson picked up along the way, besides hiking, was endurance racing, or ultramarathons. Robinson has completed the Elkhorn Endurance Run, a 62-mile foot race on deer and elk trails through the Elkhorn Mountains south of Helena, and the Le Grizz 50 Miler near Hungry Horse, 10 times each. Robinson has also run in the Wasatch Mountain Front Endurance Marathon in Utah, consisting of a 100-mile race over rugged terrain at high altitude. “I love mountain running because of the sense of freedom and adventure it provides,” he explained.

For the last seventeen years, Fred and his wife, Janet, have been together challenging themselves against nature. Janet, is a triathlete that has completed the Hawaii Ironman. Fred says, “Janet is the better athlete, but I can hold my own on long trips in the mountains.”



PHOTOS
By Fred Robinson



Janet and Fred combined their passion for fitness and the outdoors in a sport they call “fast-packing”. “We cover large distances in short periods of time with light packs and running shoes instead of boots.” One of their favorite trips, which they have done three times, is a 70 plus-mile trek through the Bob Marshall Wilderness starting at Benchmark and traveling along the Chinese Wall to Larch Hill Pass, then down the North Fork of White River and back over White River Pass to Benchmark. This is all done in 3 days.

Janet and Fred’s expedition climbing didn’t begin until they took a 5-day glacier travel and climbing seminar at Mount Adams, Washington in the summer of 2001. At that point the two set their sights on Mount Rainier. Since that time, the two, along with their experienced climbing friend, Kevin, have scaled such glaciated peaks as Mount Hood (WA), Mount St. Helens (WA), Mount Adams (WA), and finally Mount Rainier.

After Rainier in 2003, their goal became to reach the top of North America’s highest peak at 20,320 feet.

Fred and Janet flew on to the Kahiltna Glacier at 7,200 feet on May 19, 2004. After over 13,000 vertical feet, the climbing team reached the summit of Mount McKinley on June 4th! According to Robinson, the team (consisting of himself, Janet, Kevin, and another guide, Jeff) used the West Buttress Route, which is the least technical and safest route to the top. “It took 16 days from the first day at the bottom to the top. We started out with 60-pound packs and pulled sleds to help carry our gear. At first, I thought we would reach the top much sooner but many days are spent waiting out storms, resting, and acclimating to the altitude.” The descent took only 2 days.

“I love mountain running”



“The climb itself is not that technically difficult, but it can become so quickly based on the ever-changing mountain and weather conditions.” According to Robinson about 1000 people attempt the summit every summer. Only 500 are successful in reaching the top and 3 die every year trying. “Seventy-five people have died trying to summit the mountain. Most died simply because they were unprepared for the harshness of the mountain.” Robinson talks in detail about the many hazards encountered on the trip, including avalanches and crevasses. “Most folks that fail climbing Mount McKinley are either not experienced climbers or are not properly prepared and find themselves in conditions that are extremely harsh. With our guides and the number of people on the West Buttress route, I never really felt in danger.”

Robinson reflects back to one of the most “real climbing” moments on the climb. As he was ascending, he found himself on the West Buttress ridge that dropped off vertically 3,000 feet on both sides. He had a sixty pound pack and was fighting a 70-mph wind. “I had to question myself and what I was doing there. It was a grind at times, most of the time it was just plain hard work.”

But, Robinson readily admits it was worth it. “When I look back at the pictures, I wish I was back there!” In retrospect, Robinson feels a true sense of accomplishment that he is very proud. “Now I’ve had the chance to enjoy it, but it was a struggle.”

What’s in store for Fred for 2005? “Mount Aconcagua, South America’s highest peak (22,841 feet) is on the radar but at the moment, we’re getting ready for another fast packing trip from the top of Rogers Pass to Marias Pass along the Continental Divide Trail. It’s about 200 miles, but we are going to take about two weeks for that trip. Smell the roses along the way,” he said, laughing. “It’ll be just Janet and I, and, maybe a dog or two.”

CARDD Concludes Records Management Effort & Creates Library

In January 2004, the Conservation and Resource Development Division (CARDD) was paying almost \$90 a month for records storage – by January 2005, their monthly bill had been reduced to \$14. In January 2004, approximately 30 boxes of records were ‘missing’ – as it turned out, those boxes were accounted for, but due to incomplete records, the exact contents were unknown, and dozens of other boxes, filled with historical records (some dating back to the 1920s) were uncovered. CARDD leadership decided to make records management cleanup a priority. A database was created, and every piece of paper in every box (over 20 boxes of onion-skin paper alone) was examined, catalogued, and indexed. 152 boxes of valuable records were accepted by the State Historical Society, the records retention schedule was completely updated to better reflect the needs of the division and the public. Twenty-two boxes of MT Grass Commission/State Grazing District records (circa 1918-1970) were painstakingly filmed, which took over 6 months including prepping and indexing.

It became apparent early on that many of the records were either duplicates, or not a retention-required item; but they were far too valuable to simply discard. Many of the pieces allude to the political climate at the time in Montana, for example, in the 1930s-1940s, if you wanted a meeting with the Governor, the

Information Technology Bureau (ITB) Revamping DNRC Website

After being directed by ITSD, the Information Technology Bureau (ITB) has been working diligently to rework the entire DNRC webpage per the new ITSD and FCC requirements. According to Jack Zanto, ITB Chief, after several organizational meetings, DNRC web developers have created a website design that is solely subject driven, for ease of use by the public and the end users. The hope is to have the new website up and running by summer of 2006.

“Web developers have created a website design that is solely subject driven”

PHOTO By
Sharon Moore

Fiscal Bureau Completes Legislative Audit

The Legislative Auditors Office recently completed its annual financial audit of DNRC for fiscal years 2003-2004. According to Fiscal Bureau Chief, Patricia Schiltz, the auditors made several recommendations in accounting for our larger loan and trust programs. Schiltz stated that the problems identified have been fixed and mitigations have been put in place to ensure that the same problems don’t occur in the future.

capital in Helena was not the place to go – you had better plan a trip to Lewistown to try to catch him (historically, Lewistown was the state ‘barometer’ for indicating the climate in agriculture, industry, and politics). CARDD decided to create a small library of eclectic natural resource information (assessments, research papers, surveys, hand-drawn and hand-painted grazing district maps, etc.) from various sources (state, federal, local, even Canada) on subjects from agriculture and rangeland, streams, soils, forests, to mining related research and reclamation.

CARDD has thousands of pictures, which were taken over the years at projects funded in whole or part by various programs. These projects range from \$500 to over \$12 million - from a small watershed trailer demonstration in NW Montana, to a huge regional water project in NE Montana; from water and wastewater construction projects in SE Montana to a composting facility in SW Montana. CARDD has just begun the process of scanning these pictures and slides, cataloguing, and entering them into a new database to make it easier for the folks to find just the right picture for a presentation, publication, or project demonstration.

Southeast Montana Recreational Access Opened For 30,000 Acres

This past hunting season saw recreational access improved in southeast Montana through an easement across five miles of DNRC state trust land. The easement allowed hunters vehicle access to an extensive block of Bureau of Land Management acreage (30,000 acres), in southeastern Montana’s Carter County. “Goodness sakes, it opens up a tremendous area,” said John Gibson, a member of the Public Lands/Water Access Association, Inc. The association along with several sportsmen’s groups, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks and BLM worked in concert to orchestrate the access. Gibson said the cooperative effort should serve as an example that other public lands can be made more accessible through similar labor. “A lot of agencies have the potential to complete similar projects,” he said. “These guys did a commendable job, but they really needed help from sportsmen.”

